

Historical Note on Diwan Ghulam Mohiuddin and his Urdu Masnawi

Hafiz Mehmood Khan Shirani (1880-1946), the renowned linguist and researcher, pioneered the idea that Urdu as a language had its origin in the Punjab region [1]. His claim was based on years of collecting original literary sources and their meticulous evaluation. His collection of thousands of rare manuscripts of oriental languages was later purchased by the Punjab University, Lahore. This collection presently housed in the Punjab University Library is an extremely valuable resource and researchers from all over the world have benefited immensely from its contents.

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In Hafiz Mehmood Shirani's collection, there are two manuscripts of a masnawi (a type of long poem) called *Gulzar-e-Faqr*, written in an early form of Urdu [2]. This masnawi was composed in 1139 AH (1726-27 AD) by an individual named Ghulam Mohiuddin in Mirpur [3]. Hafiz Mehmood Shirani has proposed a categorization of Urdu manuscripts in his collection based on three regional schools of writers prevailing in the subcontinent that contributed significantly towards the evolution of the Urdu language. He has included masnawi *Gulzar-e-Faqr* as the oldest masnawi in the list of literary works that represent the Punjab school of early Urdu writers [4].

The whereabouts of the writer of *Gulzar-e-Faqr* had remained a mystery for decades. Hafiz Mehmood Shirani analyzed the masnawi from a literary point of view. He initially dated the masnawi to 1131 AH (1718-19 AD) and attempted to identify the name of the father of the poet from one of the couplets. As the subject of the masnawi is Islamic mysticism, it is likely that the poet was a follower of one of the mystic orders prevalent in Mirpur and adjoining areas during his lifetime [5]. Except these details, no further information was provided by Hafiz Mehmood Shirani concerning the origin and background of the writer.

In 2011, the masnawi *Gulzar-e-Faqr* was edited and published for the first time [3]. The editor performed a detailed textual evaluation of the contents of the masnawi and revised the date of its composition to 1726-27. Further to this, based on a careful historical analysis, it has been established that the poet Ghulam Mohiuddin was a member of the ruling Gakkhar family of Mirpur and enjoyed a privileged position i.e. Diwan in the hierarchy of the period aristocracy. The published version of the masnawi is based on both available manuscripts and the book also contains copies of the original texts of the manuscripts as appendices. The editor has noted that the language used in the masnawi is representative of the Urdu of its era with distinct local characteristics. The poet, a master craftsman, had complete command on his medium and successfully communicated his message across in a remarkably smooth diction.

Diwan Ghulam Mohiuddin's family remained dominant in the Mirpur region for hundreds of years until they succumbed to the rising power of the Sikhs during the early part of the 19th century [6, 7]. Apparently, they were generous patrons of learning and had an inclination towards Islamic mysticism. This is evidenced by an earlier Farsi manuscript in which the author Sheikh Fatehullah Shattari (d. 1677), a religious scholar of considerable repute, has described his interaction with Sultan Fateh Khan, an ancestor of Diwan Ghulam Mohiuddin, when he first arrived in Mirpur [8]. While staying at Sultan Fateh Khan's residence for extended duration, Sheikh Fatehullah had a chance to observe and deal with him closely. He held Sultan Fateh Khan in high esteem and lauded his character and gentle behavior profusely. Sheikh Fatehullah finally settled in Mirpur, received a grant of land from Sultan Fateh Khan to establish a mosque and seminary, and founded a local branch of his mystic order, which survives to this day [9].

Sultan Fateh Khan was a brother of Sultan Mira Khan, who had founded Mirpur in 1641-42. Sultan Fateh Khan and his descendants for two generations remained in possession of the parganah of Dangali as fief in lieu of compensation for military service rendered to the Mughal emperors [6, 7]. For more information about a prominent descendant of Sultan Fateh Khan, the reader is referred to 'Historical Note on the Well Adjacent to the Mausoleum of Mira Khan Gakkhar', ver. 1.3, dated 20th July, 2024.

Hafiz Mehmood Shirani was the first literary historian to recognize the significance of masnawi Gulzar-e-Faqr. Besides being a linguist he had an excellent sense of history and he was fully aware of the geographical setting in which this piece of literature had been created. The couplets that he repeatedly quoted from the masnawi in his published works made a clear reference to Gakkhars. He had a manuscript of Kaigoharnama in his collection as well and he was familiar with the history of Gakkhars to such an extent that he even discussed it in fair detail in one of his articles [10, 11]. Apparently there was a dearth of enthusiasm on his part most likely for want of further evidence to fully establish the history of the masnawi and the identity of the creator of this landmark literary work. The ambiguity that existed due to lack of precise identification of the whereabouts of the author led to an attempt to attribute a part of this masnawi to another mystic during the 1960s. This misattribution was promptly rejected through diligent bibliographic and historical analysis [12, 13]. It took nearly eight decades for the modern literary historian to remedy Hafiz Mehmood Shirani's reluctance as he finally managed to identify Diwan Ghulam Mohiuddin as the definite author of masnawi Gulzar-e-Faqr [14].

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